Evil

The Christian God is revealed to us as a personal, absolutely good Being Who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient and is situated outside of time and space as well as beyond the created realm.

The problem of evil can then be presented as a formal logical argument:

1. If God (as defined above) existed, there would be no evil in the world.
2. There is evil in the world.
:. Therefore, God (as defined above) does not exist.

However, for the word "evil" to have a meaning that goes beyond subjective preference, there must be an objective standard by which we measure morality. Such a standard can only exist if God (as defined above) exists. Evil is then defined as "moral sin, the rejection of good through the use of free will." To choose other than good means to choose other than God means to choose evil. Thus, we can see that not only does the existence of evil not refute the existence of God but rather it affirms it. Let's briefly look at some of the categories of evil that exist in our world (second premise):

Direct Harm
Here we are mostly talking about violence, physical as well as psychological. Murder, armed robberies, rape, torture, etc.
Indirect Harm
This is where you knowingly do harm without having to know what the person whose life you've ruined even looks like. Embezzling, monopolizing, raising prices on medicine, usury, banks gambling with their client's money and then getting the government to save them at the client's expense, culture subversion, etc.
Natural Catastrophies
In this category we are talking about humans falling victim to earthquakes, volcano eruptions, flooding, meteor strikes, droughts, etc.
Generally, these occurences function as tests, as opportunities for us to grow morally and to show compassion for our neighbours in their moments of suffering. Fallen angels or demons can also potentially be responsible for these adverse and destructive catastrophies as these entities have a degree of control over the created realm and can be out to harm humans.
Laws of Nature
The world we live in has certain properties that might result in harm or death. Gravity, centrifugal forces, the second law of thermodynamics, the bends, etc. These properties aren't good or bad but rather neutral, as the fire can keep me warm during winter or consume me and the gravity keeps me from floating off into space but is just as uncompromising if I fall off a balcony.
Bodily woes
Genetic defects, cancer, illness, sickness, etc. These seem to be beyond our control but can be countered to some degree by leading a healthy lifestyle, not reproducing

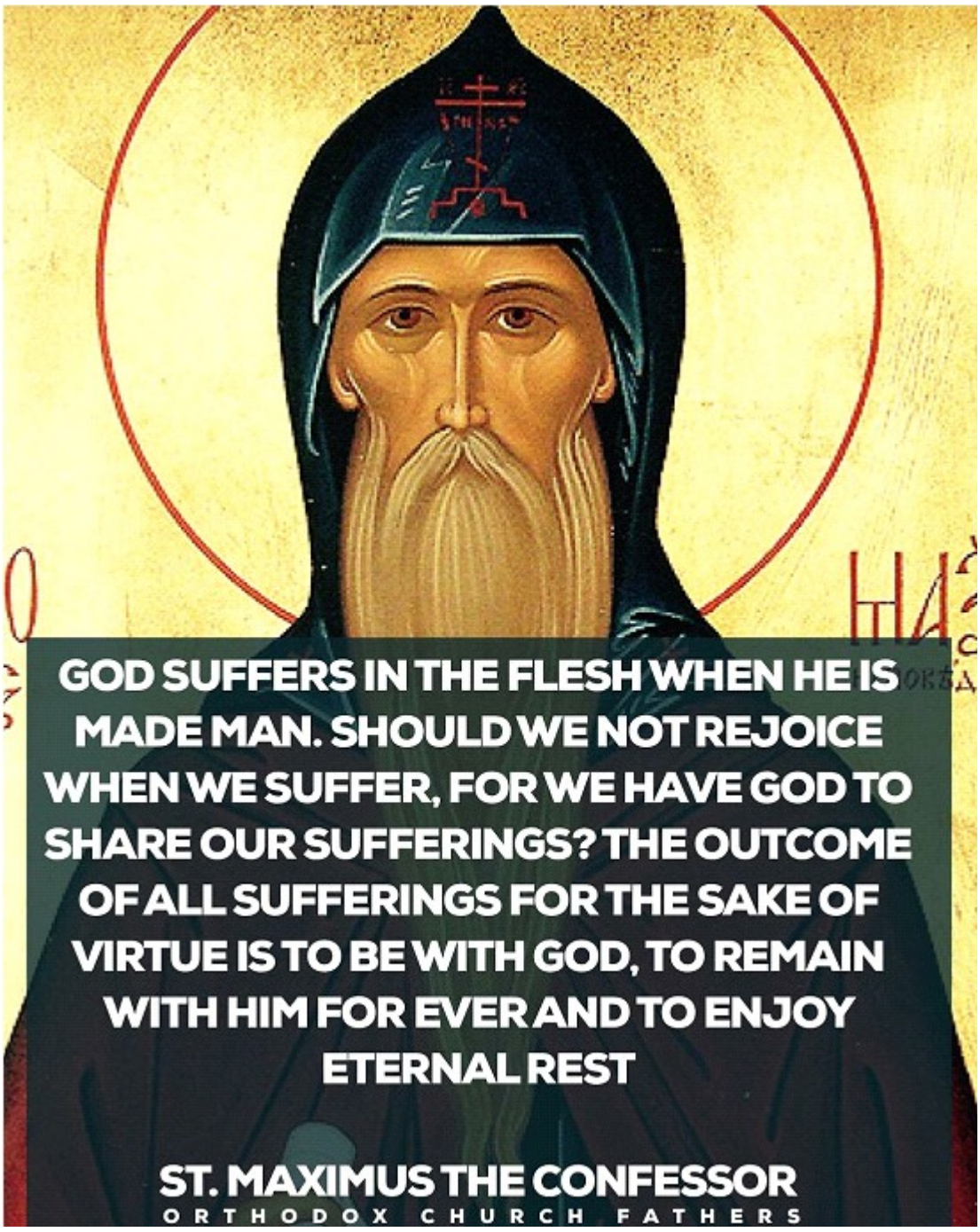
too late in life, etc.

In all of these cases our decisions play a huge role in the outcome of the situation. For God to change the particular outcome would mean to take away our free will and by extension our humanity. Evil exists because of our fallen nature but it can be balanced out by adopting responsibility and trying to minimize these effects.

"It is always the temptation of humans to make evil have an actual ontological existence. By this it is not meant that there is no evil, that it is some illusion. On the contrary, evil is very real, but in the technical philosophical sense it has no actual ontological existence. It has no "being," if you will. Evil is a relative term – it is the move of a will away from some good. It is not a "thing" or a substance. In fact, evil is not even the will, which is a faculty given by God. Evil is a descriptive term given to the action of a sentient being moving its will away from some good, and that is all it is. In this sense, it is right to say evil is a negation, like ugliness or deformation. Consider a man who is ugly: the source of the deformation is not the molecules in his body, which he shares with a beautiful woman, but the lack of beauty in his form. In a similar fashion, evil is not located in some thing, as its being or essence, but in the move of a free being's will against some good end." [1]

Based on these elaborations we can reject the first premise of the initially presented argument as unsound.

Also, we shouldn't forget that God doesn't simply excuse Himself from the picture based on His not being complicit in evil acts, but instead Himself suffers pain and death at the hands of His own creation. He becomes human and deifies our fallen nature to open up the possibility of eternal salvation to every person, living or dead (Jesus descented to Hell to preach His gospel there for those who died before His incarnation [2]). As a consequence of that He dies at the cross.


GOD SUFFERS IN THE FLESH WHEN HE IS MADE MAN. SHOULD WE NOT REJOICE WHEN WE SUFFER, FOR WE HAVE GOD TO SHARE OUR SUFFERINGS? THE OUTCOME OF ALL SUFFERINGS FOR THE SAKE OF VIRTUE IS TO BE WITH GOD, TO REMAIN WITH HIM FOR EVER AND TO ENJOY ETERNAL REST
ST. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR
ORTHODOX CHURCH FATHERS

Justice or How do we know that burning witches at the stake is bad?

«Thou shalt put evil away from among you» (Deut. 21:21)

"Having been made in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), we humans long for moral justice to prevail upon the earth and are outraged when we see injustice happening around us. Why do we seek justice for crimes? It's in our DNA." [3]

Now that we've established what evil is and how its existence does not contradict

the existence of God, let's briefly talk about crime and punishment. The sixth commandment forbids us from killing, but does that make capital punishment evil per se? "Killing" in this context means "killing without justification," which is usually referred to as "murder" today. There is an important distinction between murdering (which is always wrong) and killing someone with justification. Just like killing an attacker in self defense and killing an enemy to defend your kin and nation are not only permissable but even heroic actions, so the execution of criminals can also be in order. Can a witch potentially be such a criminal who deserves death? That depends on the witch and the case. To choose witchcraft is obviously 180° out of phase from choosing God, so it's not unthinkable, although death by burning almost certainly isn't an appropriate method of punishment:

"At the same time, the Church insists on the need of humane attitude towards suspects, persons under investigation and those caught in criminal intent. [...] The Church condemns torture and indignities towards persons under investigation. [...] Any crime committed and condemned by law presupposes a fair punishment. Its meaning is to reform an infringer, to protect society from a criminal and to stop his illegal activity. The Church, without taking upon herself to judge an infringer, is called to take care of his soul. That is why she understands punishment not as revenge, but a means of the inner purification of a sinner. [...] The Old Testament tradition knows of several forms of punishment including the death penalty, banishment, restriction of freedom, corporal punishment and fine or order to make a donation for religious purposes. [...] [A Prisoner's] pain is the pain of the whole Mother Church who rejoices with heavenly joy when even «one sinner repentieth» (Lk. 15:10)." [4]

Concerning the death penalty specifically:

"The death penalty as a special punishment was recognised in the Old Testament. There are no indications to the need to abolish it in the New Testament or in the Tradition or in the historical legacy of the Orthodox Church either. At the same time, the Church has often assumed the duty of interceding before the secular authority for those condemned to death, asking it show mercy for them and commute their punishment. Moreover, under Christian moral influence, the negative attitude to the death penalty has been cultivated in people’s consciousness. Thus, in the period from the mid-18th century to the 1905 Revolution in Russia, it was applied on very rare occasions. For the Orthodox church consciousness, the life of a person does not end with his bodily death, therefore the Church continues her care for those condemned to capital punishment.

The abolition of death penalty would give more opportunities for pastoral work with those who have stumbled and for the latter to repent. It is also evident that punishment by death cannot be reformatory; it also makes misjudgement irreparable and provokes ambiguous feelings among people. Today many states have either abolished the death penalty by law or stopped practicing it. Keeping in

mind that mercy toward a fallen man is always more preferable than revenge, the Church welcomes these steps by state authorities. At the same time, she believes that the decision to abolish or not to apply death penalty should be made by society freely, considering the rate of crime and the state of law-enforcement and judiciary, and even more so, the need to protect the life of its well-intentioned members." [4]

What matters is that God's perfect justice serves as an ideal for humans to orient themselves towards. We can certainly make mistakes in our judgment -- in legal as much as other matters -- but that does not mean that a perfectly just/right option isn't potentially available at every single instance along the way.

Sources:

[1] https://jaysanalysis.com/2013/01/28/on-evil-intrigue-and-the-left/

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrowing_of_Hell

[3] https://www.gotquestions.org/God-of-justice.html

[4] https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/ix/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3_azQwoWJY